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29. (New) A method in an auction system for bidding on an item being auctioned, the method comprising:

    sending to a user a display description identifying the item to be auctioned and for requesting to submit a bid for the item;

    receiving from the user a request to submit a bid for the item;

determining whether the user can be authenticated based on information in the received request;

when the user can be authenticated based on information in the received request, placing the bid on behalf of the user; and

when the user cannot be authenticated based on information in the received request,

sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information;

receiving from the user authentication information;

determining whether the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information; and

when the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information, placing the bid on behalf of the user.

30. (New) The method of claim 29 wherein the received request includes information stored in a cookie on a computer of the user.

31. (New) The method of claim 29 wherein the determining whether the user can be authenticated based on information in the received request includes:

extracting a user identifier from the received request; and

determining whether the user identified by the user identifier is registered.

32. (New) The method of claim 29 wherein the determining whether the user can be authenticated based on information in the received request includes determining whether the user is authorized to submit bids.

33. (New) The method of claim 29 including when the user cannot be authenticated based on information in the received request, determining whether the bid is acceptable before sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information.

34. (New) The method of claim 29 including after sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information, when the user is not currently registered, registering the user.

35. (New) The method of claim 29 wherein a suggested bid amount is included in the display description sent to the user that identifies the item.

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36. (New) The method of claim 29 including before placing a bid on behalf of the user, sending to the user a display description requesting confirmation to place the bid.

37. (New) The method of claim 29 wherein sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information, receiving from the user authentication information, and determining whether the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information compose manual authentication.

38. (New) The method of claim 37 wherein the manual authentication expires after a fixed time.

39. (New) The method of claim 37 wherein the manual authentication expires based on when a bid was last placed by the user.

40. (New) The method of claim 37 wherein the manual authentication expires based on when the user last interacted with the auction system.

41. (New) The method of claim 37 wherein the manual authentication expires after a time that is determined based on the user's past interactions with the auction system.

42. (New) The method of claim 37 wherein the user specifies conditions for expiration of the manual authentication.

43. (New) The method of claim 29 wherein the display description identifying the item to be auctioned and for requesting to submit a bid for the item does not include a request for manual authentication information.

44. (New) A method in an auction system for bidding on an item being auctioned, the method comprising:

receiving from a user a request to submit a bid for the item, the request optionally including automatic authentication information;

automatically authenticating the user based on the received automatic authentication information;

when the user can be automatically authenticated, placing the bid on behalf of the user; and

when the user cannot be automatically authenticated,

manually authenticating the user; and

when the user can be manually authenticated, placing the bid on behalf of the user.

45. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein the received request includes automatic authentication information from a cookie stored on a computer of the user.

46. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein automatically authenticating the user based on the received automatic authentication information includes:

extracting a user identifier from the received request; and

determining whether the user identifier identifies a registered user.

47. (New) The method of claim 46 including determining whether the user identified by the user identifier is authorized to submit bids.

48. (New) The method of claim 44 including determining whether the bid is acceptable before manually authenticating the user.

49. (New) The method of claim 44 including when the user cannot be manually authenticated, registering the user.

50. (New) The method of claim 44 including before receiving from the user a request to submit a bid for the item, sending to the user a display description identifying the item to be auctioned and for requesting to submit a bid at a suggested bid amount for the item.

51. (New) The method of claim 44 including before placing a bid on behalf of the user, sending to the user a display description requesting confirmation to place the bid.

52. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein manual authentication includes sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information, receiving from the user authentication information, and determining whether the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information.

53. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein after manual authentication of the user, a subsequent bid is place on behalf of the user using semi-automatic authentication.

54. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein the manual authentication expires after a fixed time.

55. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein the manual authentication expires based on when a bid was last placed by the user.

56. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein the manual authentication expires based on when the user last interacted with the auction system.

57. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein the manual authentication expires after a time that is determined based on the user's past interactions with the auction system.

58. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein the user specifies conditions for expiration of the manual authentication.

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59. (New) The method of claim 44 including before receiving from the user a request to submit a bid for the item, sending to the user a display description identifying the item to be auctioned and for requesting to submit a bid for the item wherein the sent display description does not include a request for manual authentication information.

60. (New) A method in an auction system for bidding on an item being auctioned, the method comprising:

sending to a user a display description identifying the item to be auctioned and for requesting to submit a bid for the item, the display description not requesting authentication information;

receiving from the user a request to place a bid for the item; and

after receiving the request to place a bid for the item,

sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information;

receiving from the user authentication information;

determining whether the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information; and

when the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information, placing the bid on behalf of the user.

61. (New) The method of claim 60 including determining whether the bid is acceptable before sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information.

62. (New) The method of claim 60 including after sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information and when the user is not currently registered, registering the user.

63. (New) The method of claim 60 wherein a suggested bid amount is included in the display description sent to the user that identifies the item.

64. (New) The method of claim 60 including before placing a bid on behalf of the user, sending to the user a display description requesting confirmation to place the bid.

65. (New) The method of claim 60 wherein sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information, receiving from the user authentication information, and determining whether the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information compose manual authentication.

66. (New) The method of claim 65 wherein the manual authentication expires after a fixed time.

67. (New) The method of claim 65 wherein the manual authentication expires based on when a bid was last placed by the user.

68. (New) The method of claim 65 wherein the manual authentication expires based on when the user last interacted with the auction system.

69. (New) The method of claim 65 wherein the manual authentication expires after a time that is determined based on the user's past interactions with the auction system.

70. (New) The method of claim 65 wherein the user specifies conditions for expiration of the manual authentication.



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71. (New) A computer-readable medium containing instructions for controlling a computer system to place a bid on an item being auctioned, by a method comprising:

receiving from a user a request to submit a bid for the item;  
automatically authenticating the user based on the received request;  
when the user cannot be automatically authenticated, manually authenticating the user; and  
after authenticating the user, placing the bid on behalf of the user.

72. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 wherein the received request includes automatic authentication information from a cookie stored on a computer of the user.

73. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 wherein automatically authenticating the user based on the received request includes:  
extracting a user identifier from the received request; and  
determining whether the user identifier identifies a registered user.

74. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 including determining whether the bid is acceptable before manually authenticating the user.

75. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 including when the user is not manually authenticated, registering the user.

76. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 including before receiving from the user a request to submit a bid for the item, sending to the user a display description identifying the item to be auctioned and for requesting to submit a bid at a suggested bid amount for the item.

77. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 including before placing a bid on behalf of the user, requesting from the user confirmation to place the bid.

78. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 wherein manual authentication includes sending to the user a display description requesting authentication information, receiving from the user authentication information, and determining whether the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information.

79. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 wherein after manual authentication of the user, a subsequent bid is placed on behalf of the user using semi-automatic authentication.

80. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 wherein the manual authentication expires after a fixed period.

81. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 wherein the manual authentication expires based on when a bid was last submitted by the user.

82. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 wherein the manual authentication expires based on when the user last interacted with the auction system.

83. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 wherein the manual authentication expires after a time period that is determined based on the user's past interactions.

84. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 wherein the user specifies conditions for expiration of the manual authentication.

85. (New) The computer-readable medium of claim 71 including before receiving from the user a request to submit a bid for the item, sending to the user a display description identifying the item to be auctioned and for requesting to submit a bid for the item wherein the sent display description does not include a request for manual authentication information.

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86. (New) An auction system comprising:  
means for receiving from the user a request to place a bid for the item, the request not including authentication information;  
means for sending to the user a request for authentication information after receiving the request to place a bid for the item;  
means for receiving from the user the requested authentication information;  
and  
means for placing the bid on behalf of the user when the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information.

87. (New) The auction system of claim 86 including means for determining whether the bid is acceptable before sending to the user the request for authentication information.

88. (New) The auction system of claim 86 including means for registering the user.

89. (New) The auction system of claim 86 means for sending to the user a display description of the item that includes a suggested bid amount.

90. (New) The auction system of claim 86 wherein the means for placing the bid on behalf of the user includes sending to the user a display description requesting confirmation to place the bid.

91. (New) The auction system of claim 86 wherein the user remains authenticated for subsequent submitting of bids.

92. (New) The auction system of claim 86 wherein the authentication expires after a certain period.

93. (New) The auction system of claim 86 wherein the authentication expires based on when a bid was last placed by the user.

94. (New) The auction system of claim 86 wherein the authentication expires based on when the user last interacted with the auction system.

95. (New) The auction system of claim 86 wherein the authentication expires based on the user's past interactions with the auction system.

96. (New) The auction system of claim 86 wherein the user specifies conditions for expiration of the authentication.

97. (New) An auction system comprising:  
a component that sends a display description identifying an item to be auctioned;  
a component that receives a request to submit a bid;  
a component that determines whether a user requesting to submit the bid can be authenticated based on information in the received request;  
a component that, when the user cannot be authenticated based on information in the received request, sends a request for authentication information;  
a component that receives authentication information;  
a component that determines whether the user can be authenticated based on the received authentication information; and  
a component that, when the user can be authenticated, places the bid on behalf of the user.

98. (New) The auction system of claim 97 wherein the received request includes information stored in a cookie on a computer of the user.

99. (New) The auction system of claim 97 wherein the component that determines whether the user can be authenticated based information in the received request

extracts a user identifier from the received request and determines whether the user identifier identifies a registered user.

100. (New) The auction system of claim 97 including a component that determines whether the bid is acceptable before sending a request for authentication information.

101. (New) The auction system of claim 97 including a component that registers the user after sending the request for authentication information.

102. (New) The auction system of claim 97 wherein a suggested bid amount is included in the display description sent to the user that identifies the item.

103. (New) The auction system of claim 97 including a component that requests confirmation to place the bid.

104. (New) The auction system of claim 97 wherein the authentication based on the received authentication information expires after a fixed time.

105. (New) The auction system of claim 97 wherein the authentication based on the received authentication information expires based on when a bid was last placed by the user.

106. (New) The auction system of claim 97 wherein the authentication based on the received authentication information expires based on when the user last interacted with the auction system.

107. (New) The auction system of claim 97 wherein the authentication based on the received authentication information expires after a period that is determined based on the user's past interactions with the auction system.

108. (New) The auction system of claim 97 wherein the user specifies conditions for expiration of the authentication based on the received authentication information.

109. (New) The auction system of claim 97 wherein the display description identifying the item to be auctioned does not include a request for authentication information.

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110. (New) A method in computer system for bidding on an item being auctioned, the method comprising:

receiving from an auction system a display description identifying the item to be auctioned and for requesting to submit a bid for the item;

displaying the received display description identifying the item;

receiving from a user an indication to submit the bid for the item;

sending to the auction system a request to submit the bid, the request optionally including automatic authentication information for the user;

when the auction system cannot authenticate the user based on automatic authentication information in the received request,

receiving from the auction system a display description requesting manual authentication information;

displaying the received display description requesting manual authentication information;

receiving from the user manual authentication information; and

sending to the auction system the received manual authentication information; and

when the user can be authenticated by the auction system, receiving from the auction system an indication that the bid was placed on behalf of the user.

111. (New) The method of claim 110 including retrieving the automatic authentication information from a cookie.

112. (New) The method of claim 110 including before receiving from the auction system a display description requesting manual authentication information, receiving an indication that the bid is not acceptable.

113. (New) The method of claim 110 wherein a suggested bid amount is included in the display description received from the auction system that identifies the item.

114. (New) The method of claim 110 including before receiving from the auction system an indication that the bid was placed on behalf of the user, receiving from the auction system a display description requesting confirmation to place the bid.

115. (New) The method of claim 110 wherein after the user is authenticated based on the manual authentication information, the user is automatically authenticated for subsequent bidding.

116. (New) The method of claim 115 wherein the authentication based on the manual authentication information expires after a fixed time.

117. (New) The method of claim 115 wherein the authentication based on the manual authentication information expires based on when a bid was last placed by the user.

118. (New) The method of claim 115 wherein the authentication based on the manual authentication information expires based on when the user last interacted with the auction system.

119. (New) The method of claim 115 wherein the authentication based on the manual authentication information expires after a time period that is determined based on the user's past interactions with the auction system.

A 120. (New) The method of claim 115 wherein the user specifies conditions for expiration of the authentication based on the manual authentication information.

121. (New) The method of claim 115 wherein the display description identifying the item to be auctioned does not include a request for manual authentication information.